FOR THE
RECORD
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QUOTE OF THE DAY / WEATHER

Intermittent rains are expected today in parts of Hyderabad

EXPERT GROUP SUBMITS REPORT TO P.M.O.

Third wave imminent, vaccination is key

Immunity in 67% of population not enough; need 80-90% now to reach herd immunity

Children will have similar risk as adults

An expert panel set up by an institute under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has predicted a third wave of Covid-19 hitting the country anytime between September and October, and suggested significantly ramping up vaccination pace.

THE HINDU

The committee of experts, constituted by the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), also said that children will have a similar risk as adults since paediatric facilities, doctors and equipment like ventilators, ambulances, etc. are nowhere close to what may be required in case a large number of children become infected.

The report, which has been submitted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), observed that only around 7.6% (10.4 cr) people are fully vaccinated in India and if the current vaccination rate is not increased, India can witness six lakh cases per day in the next wave.

"Leading experts have repeatedly warned of an imminent third COVID-19 wave in India. Epidemiologists predict a series of surges till we achieve herd immunity through infection or vaccination and the disease becomes endemic," the report said.

The NIDM report quoted the prediction of experts from IIT Kanpur which suggested three likely scenarios for the third wave based on the level of unlocking. In scenario one, it said that the third wave could peak in October with 3.2 lakh positive cases per day.

In scenario two, with the emergence of new and more virulent variants, the third wave could peak in September with likely five lakh positive cases per day. In scenario three, the experts predicted that the third wave could peak in late October with two lakh positive cases per day.

According to the report, earlier, it was proposed that if 67% of the population became immune (a few by infection and rest through vaccination), herd immunity could be achieved.

But this has now been complicated by the new and more virulent mutated variants of SARS Cov-2 that have the ability to escape immunity from earlier infections and in some cases even the prevalent vaccines, it said.

This has pushed the target immune population for achieving herd immunity to 80-90%.

Hence, our health system and vaccines are caught in a race against the virus and are trying to catch up with risks that are evolving every day creating uncertainty all over the world, it said.

The NIDM is now taking a clue from several warnings indicating an imminent third wave, trying to understand them and prepare for the third wave. With this backdrop, it engaged with multiple stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in an attempt to formulate consolidated recommendations for actions that can prevent or mitigate an impending surge.

The report said there isn't sufficient data to back widespread fears that children will be hit more severely in the anticipated third wave of the pandemic. However, as the virus continues to evolve, this is going to be a major challenge for children as there is no approved vaccine for children in India yet (first week of August).

TS schools and colleges to open on 1st September

The Telangana government on Monday directed all educational institutions in the State, from anganwadi centres to Post-graduate colleges, to reopen on September 1.

Panchayat Raj and Municipal Administration Ministers and departmental officials were directed to clean and sanitise all hostels and other facilities by 30th August.

The decision was taken after discussing the present Covid situation in the State with health officials. They submitted reports that the pandemic was under control as compared to past. The movement of people in the State was also returning to normalcy. The officials explained that the indefinite closure of educational institutions had resulted in mental stress on students which had the potential of impacting their future.

SC asks govt to engage with agitating farmers

A Supreme Court bench headed by Justice S.K. Kaul has said that protests and agitations, while legitimate, should not hinder public movement.

The bench was acting on a petition by a Noida-resident, Monica Agarwal, who complained that the agitators ignored Court directions to leave the road free for traffic, and that a 20-minute commute was now taking two hours.

The bench said the judicial view had already been conveyed and asked the government to immediately follow up on its orders by engaging with the farmers, who have been protesting for a year now over three agricultural laws.

— Pallavi Swaero

Govt to raise Rs 6 lakh crore by handing infra assets to private players

The Union government plans to farm out a vast trove of assets to the private sector over the next four years to raise Rs 6 lakh crore through an elaborate asset monetisation exercise.

"This is not a fire sale of government assets," Niti Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar said, taking pains to emphasise that the government would not be ceding ownership. "We are only offering brownfield assets; no land is involved."

The privatisation plan had been announced in the Union budget in February and is designed to boost the public finances of a cash-starved government.

The assets, to be offered through a variety of concession-aire models, belong to sectors like roads, ports, airports, railways, warehousing, gas and product pipelines, power generation, power transmission, mining, telecom, stadium and hospitality infrastructure.

Roads and railway assets will unlock the greatest value with the estimates put at Rs 1.62 lakh crore and Rs 1.52 lakh crore, respectively. The asset monetisation plan in the railways involves handing over 400 stations (including those in New Delhi and Mumbai), 90 passenger train operations, 1,400km of tracks, 673km of dedicated freight corridor and 15 stadiums. Railway colonies will be monetised. The stations will be handed over to the private sector under 50-99 year concessions.

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FM sets 15 Sep deadline for Infosys

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday asked Infosys chief executive officer Salil Parekh to resolve all issues with the Income Tax website by 15th September. The FM summoned the Infosys CEO after the IT department site continued to face a range of glitches even two and a half months after it was opened. Mr. Parekh assured the minister that Infosys was working expeditiously to ensure a glitch-free experience on the portal.

— Anvesh

Demand for caste count in census gathers pace

Though the prime minister Narendra Modi was non-committal on the demand for caste census in Monday's meeting with an all-party delegation from Bihar, his party's leader from the state and Rajya Sabha member Sushil Modi tweeted to say that the "BJP was never against caste-based census".

The implications of such a census on the party's OBC vote bloc in Uttar Pradesh s said to be a factor for BJP's resistance.

The Hindu reported that the Prime Minister did not counter the delegation nor did he express the Centre's inability to carry out such an exercise.

Given that the last caste census was conducted in 1931, the delegation argued that it would be a historic step, if the Prime Minister was to hold a census now.

At the end of the meeting, after listening to each member of the delegation, Mr. Modi, as per sources, said he would get the issue thoroughly examined.

Mr. Kumar said the fear that a caste census would lead to a return of the Mandal days with widespread protests and chaos was misplaced. "Every person, no matter which caste or religion he is from, wants the caste census. Once we have the caste data, then we can formulate policies for the uplift of each and every caste," he said.

Mr. Tejashwi Yadav said, "The caste census is in national interest. It will help the poor and deprived sections of society."

The caste census has seen a rare coming together of Mr. Yadav and Mr. Kumar despite their bitter campaign against each other during the Assembly election of 2020. Asked if this collaboration would extend beyond the caste census issue, Mr. Kumar said the Opposition in Bihar had always supported the government over pro-people measures and those in national interest.

Mr. Kumar and Mr. Yadav said the reply by Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai in the Rajya Sabha that there was no proposal for releasing caste-based population data had triggered unrest.

The delegation included Leader of Opposition in State Assembly Tejashwi Yadav, Congress MLA Ajit Sharma, former Chief Minister and president of the Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) Jitan Ram Manjhi, chief of the Vikashil Insaan Party Mukesh Sahani and leaders of the Left parties.

"BJP was never against caste based census. We've also been part of resolutions passed in the State legislative Assembly and Council in its support. The delegation that will meet PM Modi also includes a BJP representative", Mr. Sushil Modi tweeted on Sunday.